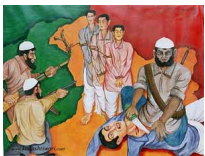


When we can rise your voice for 2,000 Muslims killed in Gujarat, we must cry from the rooftops for 2.4 million Hindus killed in 1971 or the 250,000 Kashmiri Pandits forced out of their homes in Kashmir. Why do we not? Why were the guilty not brought to book? A crime like genocide usually involves established institutions like governments or nations. For the criminals to be brought to book, one needs a dedicated champion like the legendary Nazi hunter, Simon Wiesenthal, or a driven community, who share a commonality with the victims and will not let the perpetrators to rest. The Hindu community has neither.

By Vivek Gumaste



When we can rise our voice for 2,000 Muslims killed in Gujarat, we must cry from the rooftops for 2.4 million Hindus killed in 1971 or the 250,000 Kashmiri Pandits forced out of their homes in Kashmir. Why do we not?

Public memory is short and fleeting. Events register momentarily like a blip on a radar and are then consigned to some dark corner of our cerebral galaxy. The brain needs to be bombarded with repetitive stimuli or jolted by a single moral turpitude of seismic proportions to evoke a strong and sustained re-sponse. In the absence of such reinforcement, a thought fades away from ones mind and that is the unfortunate tragedy of the Bangladesh genocide.

To ascertain the etiology of this amnesia or selective attention deficit we need to delve deeper into the details of this gory chapter of South Asia. In a massive military operation, code named Operation Searchlight aimed at crushing Bengali aspirations of autonomy, the Pakistan army in March of 1971 unleashed a deadly reign of terror that killed about 3 million Bangladeshis and forced another 10 million to seek refuge across the border in India.

Estimates of the actual numbers vary from a ridiculous low 26,000 put out by the Pakistan government (Hamood-ur-Rahman Commission) to a high of 3 million circulating in the international media. In a preface to this massacre, Yahya Khan, the military dictator of Pakistan at that time is supposed to have remarked: "Kill 3 million of them and the rest will eat out of our hands." (Pierre, Stephen and Robert Payne (1973), Massacre, New York: Macmillan, p 50). The official position from Bangla-desh concurs with the figure of 3 million.

R.J. Rummel in his book, Statistics of Democide: Genocide and Mass Murder Since 1900 (ch.8) concludes: "Consoli-dating both ranges, I give a final estimate of Pakistan's democide to be 300,000 to 3,000,000, or a prudent 1,500,000." Even this figure of 1.5 million places this massacre high up in the list of notable world genocides. While the number killed by the Khmer

Rouge in Cambodia (in excess of 2 million) may top the Bangladesh genocide, it was carried out over a period of four years in comparison to the nine-month deadly rampage of the Pakistan army: a chilling testimony to the awesome brutality of this massacre.

Who bore the brunt of this genocide? Was it the Bengali Muslims? Were the Bengali Hindus selectively targeted? Or did both communities suffer equally? It is important to know the actual distribution of the casualties for therein may lay the clue to the big unanswered question: Why were the guilty not brought to book?

The killings were not random acts of response to a mass uprising but a meticulously crafted strategy of selective victimization as Rummel indicates in his book: "In East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) (General Agha Mohammed Yahya Khan and his top generals) also planned to murder its Bengali intellectual, cultural, and political elite. They also planned to indiscriminately murder hundreds of thousands of its Hindus and drive the rest into India. And they planned to destroy its economic base to insure that it would be subordinate to West Pakistan for at least a generation to come. This despicable and cutthroat plan was outright genocide."

A report in the Sunday Times, London (June 13, 1971) corroborates the existence of such a diabolical blueprint: "The government's policy for East Bengal was spelled out to me in the Eastern Command headquarters at Dacca. It has three elements: 1. The Bengalis have proved themselves unreliable and must be ruled by West Pakistanis; 2. The Bengalis will have to be re-educated along proper Islamic lines. The — Islamization of the masses — this is the official jargon — is intended to eliminate secessionist tendencies and provide a strong religious bond with West Pakistan; 3. When the Hindus have been eliminated by death and flight, their property will be used as a golden carrot to win over the under-privileged Muslim middle-class. This will provide the base for erecting administrative and political structures in the future."

In a report submitted to the US Senate Judiciary Committee (November 1, 1971) Senator Edward Kennedy further confirms this persecution of Hindus: "Field reports to the US government, countless eye-witness journalistic accounts, reports of international agencies such as World Bank and additional information available to the subcommittee document the reign of terror which grips East Bengal (East Pakistan). Hardest hit have been members of the Hindu community, who have been robbed of their lands and shops, systematically slaughtered, and in some places, painted with yellow patches marked 'H.' All of this has been officially sanctioned, ordered and implemented under martial law from Islamabad."

An article in Time magazine dated August 2, 1971 titled Pakistan: The Ravaging of Golden Bengal ([external link](#)) categorically concluded: "The Hindus, who account for three-fourths of the refugees and a majority of the dead, have borne the brunt of the Muslim military hatred."

All this evidence clearly indicates that the Hindu community of Bangladesh was the specially culled out by the Pakistan army for this inhuman treatment. Coming to specifics, let us see whether we can ascertain with a fair degree of accuracy, the ballpark figures for the Hindus killed or driven from their homes.

In the senate judiciary committee report, Kennedy indicates that 80 percent of the refugees were Hindu that is 8 of the 10 million; a figure in line with the Time magazine report that suggests that three-fourths of the refugees were Hindu.

The percentage figures follow the same pattern when we look at the people killed. Shrinandan Vyas in an article in The Hindu titled Hindu Genocide in East Pakistan uses population statistics from the Bangladesh Ministry of Planning, Bureau of Statistics to extrapolate the number of Hindus killed by the Pakistan army: a mind-numbing figure of 2.4 million equivalents to 80 percent of the overall total of 3 million emerges.

While this is not an attempt to underplay or trivialize the sacrifices of Bangladeshis as a whole (Muslim intellectuals were also killed in large numbers), it cannot be denied that the Hindu community of Bangladesh accounted for an astronomically disproportionate share of the dead and paid a price that was more than its due.

A crime like genocide usually involves established institutions like governments or nations. For the criminals to be brought to book one needs a dedicated champion like the legendary Nazi hunter, Simon Wiesenthal, or a driven community who share a commonality with the victims and will not let the perpetrators to rest. The Hindu community has neither.

Logically it would fall upon the Bangladesh government to relentlessly pursue the executors of this horrific massacre. After some half-hearted attempts in the immediate post — 1971 periods, the Bangladesh government has relegated this issue to a back burner. Why they have done so is intriguing? Does it have to do something with Islamic brotherhood and the fact that the victims happened to be predominantly Hindu?

What about the Hindus themselves? The Hindus, wherever they maybe, are afflicted with a strange psychic malady that inhibits them from standing up for their rights or highlighting atrocities committed against them. Moreover those Hindus, who do so are shouted down by their own brethren. However, in defense of Bangladeshi Hindus, I must say that the continued oppressive religious environment in that country makes any such protest impossible, especially with their limited numbers.

The only other lobby with a special interest in this matter was predominantly Hindu India. I have always felt that India owes a moral responsibility to the Hindus left behind in Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1947. While the Muslim minority of India became a part of a secular republic with equal rights, the Hindu minority of Pakistan (and later Bangladesh) were relegated to second class status through no fault of theirs.

Could India with its famed free and secular media have played a key role? Yes, it certainly could have. And should have. But did not.

To side with Hindus even if they are right is akin to blasphemy in the vaunted circles of the free Indian media. How else can you explain the relentless crusade against the Gujarat riots that persists even to this day in comparison with the near total silence on the monumental genocide that obliterated 2.4 million Hindus from the face of the earth or the shoddy treatment meted out to the continued ethnic cleansing of a quarter million Hindus from Kashmir?

All atrocities regardless of the color, caste, creed or religion of the victims must be condemned fair and square and the perpetrators relentlessly pursued till eternity if need be and brought to

book. When we can raise your voice for 2,000 Muslims, (the official figures are much less) killed in Gujarat and we should, we must cry from the roof tops for 2.4 million Hindus killed in 1971 or the 250,000 Kashmiri Pandits forced out of their homes in Kashmir. Why do we not?